The Inquirer

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MAGIC AND THE BISHOPS

NO BISHOPS IN THE KIRK

By Lawrence Chandler

THE Church of Scotland, at the recent meetings of their General Assembly in Edinburgh, rejected the recommendations contained in the report of a commission set up a few years ago to consider practical steps towards inter-communion between the Church of Scotland and the Church of England, and ultimate union between them. The most important proposal was that there should be bishops in the Church of Scotland and elders in the Church of England. This proposal to have bishops in their church is what the Presbyterians have, quite rightly, rejected, because of the implications behind it.

The fact that such a proposal could be discussed at all at the Edinburgh Assembly bears witness to the strength of the desire for Christian unity. The bare thought is enough to make the old Covenanters turn in their graves. Was not that the very thing they fought against and were persecuted for opposing? A generation or two ago no one would have ventured on such a proposal.

By "inter-communion" is meant that the episcopal and presbyterian churches would be able to regard one another's communion services as valid, and to exchange ministers for the celebration of communion or receive one another's members as communicants. In certain areas of missionary work, notably South India, such an arrangement among the various protestant churches has been in operation for some years. The need for co-operation was so great there that it broke down the barriers. This experiment has worked very successfully and has been of great advantage to the churches and missionary societies concerned.

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If it were merely a matter of common sense and Christian charity, the churches here at home might have united long ago. It is in the realm of ideas that the barriers lie. If all that Christians bothered their heads about was the need to worship God, to follow Christ in purity and righteousness of life, and to live in charity with all men, these stupid and unnecessary divisions would not exist. If Christian charity were the chief consideration, what is to prevent Anglican priests now from admitting Presbyterians to their communion, or Presbyterians from admitting Anglicans now? Surely the communion service, symbolising as it does the bond of unity among all Christ's disciples, should not be made an occasion for excluding any who sincerely seek to follow him.

No, the reason for this exclusiveness between different "orthodox" denominations is that Christian charity and the simplicity of the gospel are subordinated to priestly theories, sacramental theories, and ecclesiastical doctrines that seem to be more important to those who hold them.

Take this question of bishops in the Presbyterian Church. Why should the Anglicans insist on the Presbyterians accepting bishops before they will formally acknowledge them as members of the true Church of Christ? If it were merely a matter of calling moderators by a different name, no one would object very much. But it goes deeper than that, and involves ideas which are clearly repugnant to most Presbyterians and, indeed, to all non-conformists.

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The clergy of the Church of England have a doctrine to which many of them attach great importance. It is the doctrine of Apostolic Succession. According to this doctrine the present bishops of the Church of England are direct successors of the original apostles of Christ. The theory is that St. Peter became the first Bishop of Rome. He ordained the bishop who succeeded him, and he in his turn ordained the next, and so on. The Bishops of Rome came in time to be called Popes, and they ordained all the bishops whom they sent out as missionaries to convert the heathen nations, including England. They in turn ordained native bishops to rule over the church in those lands. At the Reformation the organization of the English Church remained unchanged, and so its clergy to-day are able to claim that their bishops are still invested with all the authority and powers which Jesus bestowed upon His twelve apostles, and which have been transmitted down through nearly two thousand years of history by the laying on of innumerable pairs of episcopal hands. The Roman Church disputes this claim, but that's another story. Now, one of the powers which, according to this doctrine, only a properly consecrated bishop can possess, is the authority to ordain priests, and only priests so ordained can administer a valid sacrament. That is to say, it is they only who have the power, by uttering the appropriate words, to change the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. Therefore, according to this doctrine, no communion service conducted by a minister who is not a priest ordained by a bishop in the true line of apostolic succession can be a real communion service, because Christ is not truly present in it.

To satisfy the requirements of Anglican doctrine, then, it would not be enough merely to appoint certain officials in the Presbyterian Church and give them the name of bishops. The new Presbyterian bishops would have to be ordained by an Anglican or Scottish Episcopal archbishop, and from henceforth all new ministers would have to receive their ordination at the hands of these bishops, so that they could receive the magical power that is supposed to be transmitted from the first apostles. If the Presbyterian Church were to accept such an arrangement, it would be a virtual admission that their existing ministry was no true ministry and their existing communions were no true communions. It is no wonder that they have refused.

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All these doctrines belong to a world of thought that is far removed from ours. It is hard to see how intelligent men can believe them. They belong to what is called the sacramental view of religion, but we might better call it the magical view, because it makes salvation depend more upon magic than upon morality. It is nonsense to pretend that any body of clergy, because they have had the bishop's hands laid on them and certain words pronounced over them, possess some mysterious power no other men can possess, and which is necessary for the salvation of other men's souls. It is nonsense to pretend that they can change bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. Even as a matter of history, the apostolic succession cannot be proved true, since there are large gaps in our knowledge of the early centuries. But even if it could be proved beyond doubt that present-day bishops were in unbroken succession from the first apostles, that would not convince us that they had inherited any supernatural powers from them. Whatever spiritual influence these clergymen are able to exert for the good of their fellow men is owing, not to any formal ceremony they underwent on entering the ministry, but to their own qualities of character as Christian men. And those qualities they probably owe more to their parents and the guides and counsellors of their youth than to any bishop.

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For there is a great truth of which the above-mentioned doctrine is a grotesque parody. Though there is no such thing as an apostolic succession, there *is* a spiritual succession. The contagion of Christ's spirit is caught by one person from another. A soul on fire with love for God and men kindles a like flame of devotion in some of those who come within the circle of its influence. The spirit of God cannot be restricted within narrow ecclesiastical channels, and many fine Christian souls owe nothing whatever of their qualities of character to bishops or priests or sacraments. Look at the many outstanding Christians the Society of Friends has produced, and it has neither a professional ministry nor baptism nor communion.

Such doctrines as this which we have been considering are not only false, they are irrelevant to Christian living. They hide the simplicity of the gospel under a thick veil of superstitution, and make salvation seem to depend on other things than doing justly and loving mercy and walking humbly with God. Above all, they raise artificial barriers between one body of Christians and another, and so delay the dawning of that day when the scriptural prayer shall be fulfilled: “that they all may be one.”

A UNITARIAN BROADCAST SERVICE

By L. Baker Short

WHEN one is invited to undertake that rare thing, a Unitarian broadcast service, it is difficult to decide what line to adopt in presenting ourselves to the public. Such a difficulty faced me when I broadcast from the Swansea Unitarian church on Sunday evening, June 7th, in the Welsh Home Service. Should one give an obviously Unitarian address—a line advocated by the more aggressive type of Unitarian? Or should one rather suggest the spirit and atmosphere of Unitarianism by a more indirect approach?

Actually I doubt whether the direct attack would be approved by the broadcasting authorities, for one has to submit beforehand the script of ones' address. Certainly it would not encourage the authorities to grant us more broadcasts. But in any case I personally believe that the more indirect approach is both wiser and more courteous when addressing a large unseen audience of all kinds of people who are wanting spiritual help, but who will listen with a preliminary suspicion of Unitarians.

So I adopted the indirect approach. But of course the service was known to be Unitarian both from the Radio Times and from the words spoken by the announcer both before and after the service. Furthermore, in the Call to Worship at the start of the service I spoke these words: “To-night we invite radio listeners to join with us in this act of Unitarian worship in the Mother Church of Nonconformity in Swansea—to share the worship of a dissenting congregation whose history dates back beyond the year 1672—a congregation which throughout the centuries has maintained divine worship, and witnessed to human brotherhood. Let us worship God.” My hymns were all taken from our Unitarian “Hymns of Worship,” but none of them happened to be by a Unitarian, but were by a Catholic, Wesleyan, Quaker and so forth. In my address I never used the words Unitarian or Unitarianism, but on the contrary I mentioned and quoted Charles Wesley and Quaker Whittier.

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My address was indeed meant to express the true Unitarian universalism—the basic spiritual religion which makes its appeal to every human soul, and which lies behind all the differences of creed and sect. My one reading was taken from the New Testament—from an Epistle. In my address I referred to the Old Testament, and to Paul. I made only a passing reference to early Christianity, and never once used the words “Jesus” or “Christ.” Only twice during the service—in my prayer and in my benediction—did I refer to “our master, Jesus.” The congregation sang the Lord's Prayer. The address was in fact pure theism, with a humanistic stress on the imminent working of God. It aimed to convey the spirit and atmosphere of our Unitarian faith.

That it did not fail of this purpose has been amply confirmed to me by the correspondence which has since come to me from non-Unitarian listeners all over Wales and from some parts of England. Old, sick, lonely, suffering, unhappy, bereaved people wrote to me, all testifying to the help and comfort they had received from the service. Some asked God's blessing on my work, and one expressed the hope that I might broadcast again soon. Not one letter was condemnatory, though some of my correspondents were obviously evangelical and probably even fundamentalist. Both men and women wrote. One woman in Dorset asked me to pray for a son who is a great sorrow to her. Another woman wrote from Jersey: “I am a Catholic . . . Thank you very much for the sad service . . . God bless you. I will say a little Prayer for you.” And she enclosed money for me to pass on to a T.B. charity. Right at the other extreme a British Buddhist wrote expressing his appreciation! A discerning Baptist lady approved of my address, but said: “You seem to lay stress on Human love and friendship . . . Surely you found the Holy Spirit the comforter and sustainer . . ? I sensed that you did not refer to ‘The Lord Jesus,’ only twice, and then as ‘Master.’ As I do not know the Unitarian Creed, you may care to enlighten me . . . Have you any literature on your faith?”

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A man wrote: “I am not a member of the Unitarian Church, but as I should like to read what your beliefs are, I am wondering if you have any explanatory literature or magazine?” And he enclosed stamps for postage. Finally, from Bristol, an old man of 88, an arthritic cripple, with a bed-ridden wife of 86, wrote to tell me how much my service had helped them in an hour of distress and despair, when they had been tempted to feel that God “does not care for us in old age.” “You can take it from me you made a big impression on the thoughts of our hearts. I didn't know you Unitarians preached. I don't know your doctrine, but have always fought shy of your services. You have a big church in Bristol. I don't know what you preach, but if Sunday was a sample I can say God bless your fine message on love . . . You have proved a blessing to two old folk who are passing through a rough time . . . We do thank you once more. I'll think better of Unitarians now.”

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These letters, I believe, show that a true Unitarian universalism can speak to all human hearts and needs. The Rev.

Glyn Parry-Jones, in charge of religious broadcasts in Wales, in response to my offer, has asked to see this correspondence, as he would like to see the reaction to a Unitarian broadcast. I may add that quite a number of Unitarians, ministerial and lay, have written their appreciation of the service. By word of mouth a Methodist has expressed her pleasure at my quotation of Charles Wesley. As a result of such a broadcast I cannot but feel that the essential spirit of Unitarianism has won a warmer place in the hearts of many listeners.

Correspondence

Letters should be addressed to the Editor, "The Inquirer", 14 Gordon Square, London, W.C.1. They should not in general exceed three to four hundred words in length.

UNITARIAN ARCHITECTURE

Sir: May I put before your readers a similar plea to that which I made some years ago before the building of Essex Hall. This time my plea is occasioned by the publication of the new Speke Church Appeal, an appeal which I hope will be supported financially if I cannot feel myself able to support it architecturally.

I cannot criticise in detail the proportions of the tower and ancillary buildings at Speke, as these may have been forced upon the architect against his will, but I must again protest at the "harking back" flavour of the design. This seems to symbolise the dangers that lie in wait for the most hopeful manifestation in the Unitarian movement; namely the formation of fellowships and their eventual growth into churches.

The danger is that in every respect the new fellowships will seek merely to be a replica of the old Unitarian Churches, which for the most part are not answering the needs of many people, and which seem intolerably dry to even the most thoughtful and seeking of young people. In architecture our new churches will seek to be "cosy" and safe in appearance. We cannot afford the full blooded old architectural styles as they are too expensive to build and so we shall have a watered down version of one of them, or even worse, a mixture of styles with a nodding recognition of 1930 design by the use of one of the less commendable cliches of that period. In worship we shall try to emulate the old services with the old hymns rightly loved by many, but equally rightly found unsatisfying to the younger generation), on the basis that experiment is not suitable to the worship of God, even if very few people now want to take part in that particular form of worship.

The fellowships, with which I have been personally connected, are a sign of hope for a dying religious movement. Yet as soon as a fellowship as been successfully formed for a number of years the pressure is for it to acquire all the appearances of its forebears. By all means call it by the name Church if you wish, although the name Fellowship with its implications of a smaller body still seems a good one to me.

But why should its new buildings be a high, acoustically-difficult room when something lower, more intimate, more suitable for the spoken word, possessing the simplicity of many a Friends Meeting House, and incidentally being cheaper to build, might be more appropriate.

Can we not have a genuine seeking after that which is good in contemporary life, even seeking ourselves to push forward the frontiers of knowledge in art and the attempt to establish contact with a Universal God. Retain that which is good in the old but restate it in contemporary terms. Let our architecture and our worship be adventurous, forward looking, yet simple. Let us cater for the needs of to-day and to-morrow from the firm foundations of the basic principles, rather than the outworn forms, of Unitarianism.

James H. Ashcroft, B.Arch(L'pool), A.R.I.B.A.

Leeds 8.

"The Flight of the Educated"

Sir: The anonymous author of your front page article this week (June 13th) asks: "Why not an immediate new scheme involving the closing of our three present colleges, the training of candidates for the ministry at a single centre (London?) and the selection of the most highly educated and able candidates (he does not say who is to do the "selecting"!) their "placing" at potiential promising points in our movement (he does not say who is to decide which are the growing points!) with "centrally assured" Burnham scale salaries! Why not? I could give him and your readers most passionately scores of reasons "why not." The chief of these reasons would be that such action would result in the "immediate" (your contributor's word!) end of the Unitarian ministry as such and the end of all our deeply cherished mental and spiritual traditions of freedom of thought and speech. It would mean also the practical end of the majority of our ancient or not so ancient meeting houses, chapels or churches as places where free men and women may meet, not just as the recipients of a selected programme of academic tuition from selected teachers of "high academic qualification" or of certain approved social and political views, but as spiritual communities meeting in freedom and in truth (as they see it)! for the worship of God.

Your contributor's scheme would only become possible if most or many of our endowed chapels or churches were immediately closed, their endowments arbitrarily taken over by a central "authority" (note that word "authority") and a handful of bustling bright young men "with centrally assured Burnham scale salaries being directed" here or there. I thank God that this nightmare thought is not likely to be agreed by the great majority of the very independent trustees of our churches and financial trusts.

Lincoln. H. W. Kenshill.

Sir: One sentence in the contributed leader of the current "Inquirer" horrifies me.

"It may be necessary drastically to reduce the number of our Churches."

What about the unfortunate Unitarians who at present attend these Churches which are to be closed?

The small church at Newcastle, Staffs, has at least five graduates, lay men and women, able and willing to take services; many churches are run without ministers. I doubt very much whether your contributor could legally close these churches without the consent of their members. We go to Church to worship God and to hear the ethical and religious teachings of Jesus. If we want lectures on science and philosophy we can go to the W.E.A.

Your article is most unworthy of the high standard of "The Inquirer."

Lilian Beard, B.A., B.Sc.Hons. Maths (Manchester).

Windermere.

Muts

Sir: In a part of the article "The Flight of the Educated" (Inquirer of 13th June) your contributor has commented on my article "Religion for MUTS" in the same issue. I should point out, however, that MUTS in the article represents the average man. By far the greater part of the membership of our Unitarian Churches is composed of ordinary, average men and women such as myself. In calling MUTS a moron, therefore, your contributor is saying that an overwhelming proportion of the membership of Unitarian Churches are morons. This amounts to nothing more than abuse of the worst kind.

K. S. Empson.

Preston.

The Resurrection

Sir: May I be allowed a brief comment on Mr. Short's letter in answer to mine. I agree that Paul was not a typical early Christian, but he was one who played a crucial part in the development of Christianity, and any attempt to interpret the Resurrection which leaves his thought and experience out of account is utterly inadequate. It is surely of the greatest significance, moreover, that Paul equates the appearance of Jesus to Peter and the rest with his own vision on the road to Damascus. The Apostles were certainly convinced that Jesus "shewed himself alive after his passion by many proofs", and it seems far more likely that their conviction was grounded in experience of a visionary character (which has many parallels in history) than that it was simply an inference from a preconceived scheme of thought. Whatever the precise basis of Paul's mystical theology, it must have been rooted in something deeper than his unfulfilled hopes of a speedy last judgment.

Sidney Spencer.

Bath.

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West of England—The Rev. C. G. Toone has resigned the pastorate at Newton Abbot, but proposes to continue with that of Moretonhampstead. This follows the doctor's report which shows some weakness of heart, necessitating lighter work. He has also resigned as Scribe of the Exeter Assembly of the Devon Divines.

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THE AMERICAN UNITARIAN MAY MEETINGS

By John Kielty

(The Rev. John Kielty, Secretary of the General Assembly, attended as a guest speaker the Annual Meetings of the American Unitarian Association)

THE May Meetings have always been held in Boston. To a New Englander that seems only right and proper. But Unitarianism has now at least a footing in every one of the fifty States of the Union and so the Middle West, the Far West and the South are beginning to challenge this traditional monopoly. To prove that it is a progressive movement the A.U.A. is taking steps to have the legal standing of itself amended to permit it to meet elsewhere in America. Some, I hear, are even more revolutionary, they want to take the Headquarters from Boston to some more central city. Where? Well, they all appear to know, but hardly any two agree, so Boston is likely to have it for some time to come, and further evidence of this is shown by the acquisition of a house at the back of the present building to give more office space.

Here the Meetings begin on a Thursday and go through until the following Tuesday when the Banquet is held. Every society that one ever thought of and one or two quite new to British ears meets at that time and they all appear to have either a lunch or a supper. It is said that *The Wall Street Journal*, the equivalent, if such there can be, of *The Financial Times*, started an editorial some time ago with these words: "Let us face it, the best bargain in America is the Church Supper." It is true, both in Churches and at the A.U.A. Nowhere else can one get such a meal at such a price. Several hundreds of ministers and delegates are here assembled, some having travelled farther than I to be present. And right merry and happy they are, a grand people to be with at this time.

Judge Brooks, who came to the opening of Essex Hall, gave a fine appreciation of Frederick May Eliot as he knew him, and as most of us who had that privilege thought of him. The Anniversary Service at 8.15 p.m. Sunday in Arlington Street was a wonderful experience. A crowded church, fine music, grand congregational singing, and the processional entry of over 200 ministers in gowns, was an experience never to be forgotten. I can't quite make up my mind about the sermon, well delivered, its matter and purpose seemed strange to English ears, maybe we take such matters too seriously. The Ware lecture filled the large John Hancock Hall almost to the doors and Professor George Wald of the Biology Department at Harvard did not disappoint us. With the ease of the master of his craft he spoke and held all for over an hour on "The Ways of Beasts and Men—The Evolution of Behaviour." Not so intellectual that we could not understand, it was a fine utterance.

Four young Harvard Divinity School youngsters gave us "New Thinking among Unitarian Christains," and if some of us thought we heard ourselves thirty years ago maybe it was illusion. Anyway, it was well done and it is nice to know such young men have the courage to make themselves heard. Most impressive was The Living Tradition of the Ministry Service at which the men who have died in the past year are remembered and those who have entered the ministry are welcomed by the President of the A.U.A. and the President of the Ministers Association. Friends in London will be pleased to know that the Preacher was the Rev. Dan. H. Fenn, who some years ago served Hampstead as exchange minister. Which reminds me of the eagerness of so many ministers here to exchange with their British brethren. What a pity finance does not permit it. Maybe some rich Unitarian will one day have the happy thought of endowing such an idea with the necessary funds. We could all learn a lot from each other in this way.

In a few hours now the banquet will be over and the delegates and ministers will have said their last farewells as they hurry back to take final services ere the long summer vacation descends upon the land. They deserve such a break for they work very hard indeed in the Fall, Winter and Spring and. Thank God, the growth of the movement must give them great reward. For me it has been a wonderful experience meeting old friends and making new ones. Among the former it has been good to see Henry and Connie Cheetham again and talk and eat with them. They labour in Virginia amid the storms and tensions of the colour problem and do a fine piece of work. They send greetings to all old friends in Britain.

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